

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Elko Field Office**

**CALIFORNIA NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL INTERPRETATIVE CENTER
AND I-80 REST STOP WAYSIDES**

**Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record
(File 8361/1792; BLM/EK/PL-2003/028)**

In November 2003, the BLM completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed development and operation of the California National Historic Trail Interpretive Center near Elko, Nevada, and for the installation of interpretive signage at four existing rest stops along Interstate 80 as it crosses northern Nevada.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have determined that the proposed action, as described in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. Reasons for this finding are based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) with regard to the context and intensity of impacts, as discussed in the EA.

Context: The California Trail was used primarily between 1841 and 1869. Development of the Interpretive Center has been a vision of many people in the Elko area for the past decade. Public Law 106-577 was passed by Congress on December 28, 2000, “... *to establish the California Trail Interpretive Center in Elko, Nevada, to facilitate the interpretation of the history of development and use of trails in the settling of the western portion of the United States...*” The proposed signage at the four existing rest stops along Interstate 80 are the first of many waysides envisioned to work in concert with the Center to enhance the region-wide interpretive story of the Trail as emigrants crossed northern Nevada. The BLM has completed planning for development of the interpretive facilities in collaboration with many interested agencies, organizations and individuals.

Intensity: As discussed in the EA, there are no impacts associated with development of the four rest stop waysides. The following review of impacts against the CEQ’s ten factors for intensity is associated with development of the interpretive center.

1. Beneficial and adverse impacts are summarized as follows:

- *Air Quality* - Increased traffic due to visitation to the Center and waysides would affect air quality, but levels would still remain within acceptable standards.
- *Noise* -- Noise levels would increase due to increased traffic to the Center, but would not be noticeable given ambient levels from traffic on the interstate.
- *Cultural Resources* -- Benefits are expected to occur as the public becomes educated about the significance of the Trail and need for its protection. However, potential disturbance to Trail reaches may also result due to increased visitation.

- *Land Use* – The parcel where the Center would be developed was previously owned and used by the Maggie Creek Ranch. Private use of the site would be replaced by public use.
 - *Soils and Water Quality* – Soil and water resources could be affected during and after construction of facilities at the center site. Impacts include increased sediment loading, pumping of ground water, and storm water runoff from impervious areas, including a parking lot and trails. Best management practices would be integrated in the design and construction of the facilities.
 - *Recreation and Interpretation* -- Opportunities to actively draw the public to the region to experience the history of the California Trail would be realized.
 - *Visual Resources* – Although visible from I-80, the Center has been designed to not be an evident visual modification to the existing landscape.
 - *Vegetation and Wildlife* – The construction of facilities at the site would cause the loss of about 25 acres of vegetation, most of which would be restored. The permanent loss is about 6 acres. Restoration of about 28 acres using native plant species is expected to benefit wildlife, including migratory birds.
 - *Noxious Weeds* – There is a potential for noxious weeds to increase during construction at the site, and to be introduced by visitors to the Center. Benefits would occur from BLM's weed control efforts in disturbed and restored areas.
 - *Socioeconomic Conditions* – The local economy is expected to benefit by employment of construction workers and expenditures by visitors to the Center.
2. The proposed action would have no effect on public health or safety.
 3. The analysis considers potential effects to unique characteristics of the geographic area. No pristine historic Trail reaches, unique cultural resources, Native American sacred sites, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or areas of critical environmental concern are present at the Center site. Small localized fossil finds reported in the upper reaches of the Hunter site are not in areas to be disturbed by construction of the interpretive center facilities, and construction of interpretive trails in this portion of the site would be monitored to avoid impacts to fossils of significant interest. Also, visitor use off of designated trails would be discouraged. Adverse effects to species of special concern or their habitat are not expected.
 4. Effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial.
 5. Possible effects are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.
 6. The action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Future plans for the interpretive story and additional waysides continue to be coordinated with interested parties.
 7. The action is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.
 8. The degree to which the action may adversely properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places is analyzed. No loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources is anticipated. Increased visitation and potential disturbance to traces of the California National Historic Trail may result from an increased awareness of this historic resource. On the positive side, heightened awareness of the significance of the Trail could lead to a desire to preserve Trail remnants. The Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer and Tribal

representatives will continue to participate in development of the interpretive story to be presented at the Center and proposed wayside sites, to assure adverse effects to the Trail and any other significant cultural resources would be minimal.

9. No impact to any species that is listed, or proposed for listing, as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act is anticipated. No critical habitat for any species has been designated or is proposed in the action area. The action is not expected to contribute to the need for listing of any species of concern.
10. The action does not threaten to violate any Federal, State, local or Tribal law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Decision

It is my decision to implement the proposed action, as described in the EA for the California National Historic Trail Center and I-80 Rest Stop Waysides (BLM/EK/PL-2003/028).

Rationale

1. Development of the center and waysides will facilitate the interpretation of the history of development and use of trails in the settling of the western portion of the U. S.
2. Establishment of the interpretive center was authorized and directed by Congress with passage of Public Law 106-577, on December 28, 2000. Federal support has included funding measures for initial studies and design of the center. Because of Congressional action, it is not within the authority of the BLM not to develop and operate the center. The No Action alternative was not selected because it would result in the start of a new process to select another site, and prepare and analyze new designs for an interpretive center.
3. A feasibility-level study resulted in identification of two alternative sites for location of the center – the Elko City Park and Hot Hole sites. The City Park site was eliminated from detailed analysis due to public and agency concerns for removal of existing facilities and design constraints. The Hot Hole site, also located in the city of Elko, was eliminated because it would require significant site restoration and concurrent implementation of related projects by others, such as the Humboldt Area River Project, with agreement of a number of agencies with various opinions.
4. The action is consistent with the approved Elko Resource Management Plan and current BLM and Departmental policies and procedures. It has been planned in collaboration with local partners, and is consistent with other Federal, State, local and tribal policies and plans to the maximum extent possible.
5. The project has been designed to incorporate best management practices and environmental design and monitoring features. No undue degradation of the environment is anticipated.

Public Involvement

Five public meetings were held to identify issues and refine concepts for the Center and waysides. Plans for the Center have been developed in partnership with the California Trail Center Advisory Board, and meetings were held with the Nevada Department of Transportation, City of Wells, National Park Service, and various organizations and

companies. Funding commitments from the City of Elko, Elko County and the State of Nevada have been granted. Consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer has been conducted, and continues with respect to development of interpretive plans and waysides. Participation by numerous tribes in the area has been invited throughout the process, and discussions for concerns they may have for interpretive stories and exhibits for the Center and waysides continues.

This document is available upon request to the Elko Field Office, and will be posted with the EA on our public webpage at <http://www.nv.blm.gov/elko>.

Approval

Development and operation of the California National Historic Trail interpretive facilities is approved. This decision is subject to appeal under regulations found in 43 CFR 4.

/s/ David Stout for
Helen M. Hankins
Field Manager

7/23/04
Date